

The Whispering Cloth

by Pegi Deitz Shea

illustrated by Anita Riggio

stitched by You Yang

Boyds Mills Press, 1995

ISBN 1-56397-623-4

Mai and her grandmother live in Ban Vinai camp in Thailand, waiting to come to America. While they wait, Grandmother teaches Mai how to embroider pa'ndau, Hmong story cloths. *The Whispering Cloth* is a story of a child's hope in the midst of confinement and war.

Classroom Activities Grades 3-8

What does the title *The Whispering Cloth* mean? **Discuss** why in your opinion this is/is not a good title. Brainstorm other titles for this book.

Discuss what life is like inside Ban Vinai refugee camp. **Compare** your life to Mai's. How might it feel for each of you if you were to switch places?

Locate Vietnam and Cambodia on the globe. Locate Laos and Thailand. Find the Mekong River and Ban Vinai. **Discuss** the Foreword. **Learn the words** in the Glossary.

Compare the needlework in *The Whispering Cloth* to the needlework in *The Keeping Quilt* by Patricia Polacco and *Tar Beach* by Faith Ringgold. How is needlework important to each story?

Read and discuss other picture books about refugee or displaced people: *Fly Away Home* by Eve Bunting, *The Silver Path* by Christine Harris, *The Always Prayer Shawl* by Sheldon Oberman, *How Many Days To America?* by Eve Bunting.

Make a pa'ndau of your own life. Start by making a line drawing on paper. Tape the paper to a window or a light box. Cover the drawing with a piece of broadcloth or muslin. A clean handkerchief will work too. Tape the fabric in place. Carefully trace your drawing onto the fabric. Remove the fabric, and thread an embroidery needle with colorful embroidery thread or floss. Carefully fill in your drawing with tiny stitches "the length of a grain of rice". **Write the story** depicted in your cloth and display it next to your pa'ndau for all to see.

Reviews

"...Closeup photos of Yang's textured needlework, as well as Riggio's accomplished watercolor and gouache paintings, add to the poignancy of the tale. Bound to elicit many questions."

–Publishers Weekly

"...Soft-toned watercolor and gouache illustrations set the story in the present; then reproductions of the real stitched story cloths by Hmong refugee You Yang show the child's war experiences. The stitched pictures in folk-art style distance the brutality, both showing and telling that art can be a powerful force..."

–Booklist

"...My parents survived from the refugee and the soldiers. They swam to Thailand... This book is a believable story and you use your imagination about the cloth talking and speaking. I would recommend this book to any child or grown up who is interested in a refugee's story."

–Jennifer from Bryant School, San Francisco, CA

Awards

National Council of Teachers of English Notable Children's Book in Language Arts.

National Council of Social Studies – Children's Book Council Notable Trade Book in the Field of Social Studies

International Reading Association Teachers' Choice, 1996.

Schedule

For general information about Anita Riggio's school visits, email: info.visit@anitariggio.com

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